

VZCZCXYZ0009
PP RUEHWEB

DE RUEHAK #4528/01 2200509
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 080509Z AUG 06
FM AMEMBASSY ANKARA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7724
INFO RUFDAAA/USAREUR HEIDELBERG GE PRIORITY
RUEHAK/USDAO ANKARA TU PRIORITY
RHEHAAA/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEUITH/ODC ANKARA TU PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC//J-3/J-5// PRIORITY
RUFOADA/JAC MOLESWORTH RAF MOLESWORTH UK PRIORITY
RHMFISS/HQ USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY
RHMFISS/HQ USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE PRIORITY
RHMFISS/425ABS IZMIR TU//CC// PRIORITY
RHMFISS/39ABG INCIRLIK AB TU PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L ANKARA 004528

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/04/2031
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [MARR](#) [MOPS](#) [TU](#)
SUBJECT: TURKEY'S NEW CHOD -- DIFFERENT STYLE, SAME STRATEGY

REF: A. ANKARA 4378

[1](#)B. ANKARA 3772

[1](#)C. ANKARA 1153

Classified By: Ambassador Ross Wilson, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: The July 31 announcement of Turkish Land Forces (TLFC) Commander General Buyukanit's appointment as the next Chief of the General Staff (CHOD) five days earlier than expected (ref a) caused few ripples in the press. Buyukanit's appointment was preordained by military tradition and considered unassailable after charges that he sought to influence the trial of security personnel involved in a 2005 book store bombing were dropped and the prosecutor was fired and disbarred. Buyukanit is known for his warmth, charisma and direct communication style and is considered a friend to the US. Despite reports that the GOT in general and PM Erdogan in particular fear that, as CHOD, Buyukanit could re-assert the military's primacy and threaten Turkey's EU candidacy, we expect him to stay the course begun by his predecessor and support Turkey's Western aspirations. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (C) On Aug. 30, at the age of 65, Land Forces Commander GEN Yasar Buyukanit will success GEN Hilmi Ozkok as Turkey's next CHOD. Unlike other force commanders who must retire at age 65, the CHOD can retire at 67. Buyukanit will serve until Aug. 29, 2008, at which time First Army Commander GEN Ilker Basbug, who will replace Buyukanit as TLFC Commander this year, would succeed him barring any unexpected changes.

[1](#)3. (C) The July 31 announcement of Buyukanit's appointment came one day before the official start of the biannual Supreme Military Council (YAS) meeting to discuss the promotion, retirement and selection out of officers for cause. The YAS is comprised of the Prime Minister, Minister of Defense, CHOD, and all other serving four-star generals, including the Army, Air Force and Navy Commanders. The CHOD decision is not made by the YAS but by the Council of Ministers and approved by the President. However, the announcement would normally come at the end of the week-long meeting along with the YAS decisions. The selection as CHOD is traditionally preordained, with candidates following a career path from the DCHOD to the First Army Command and to the Land Forces Command, the largest of Turkey's three services, before receiving the top job. Buyukanit did so, serving as DCHOD from 2000-2003, First Army Commander from 2003-2004, and TLFC Commander from 2004-2006.

14. (C) While early, the decision was not unexpected, and was generally eclipsed in the press by news about PKK activity and the situation in Lebanon. Government officials explained the timing as a result of PM Erdogan's participation in the emergency OIC meeting in Malaysia, which would cause him to miss most of the Aug. 1-4 YAS meeting. Therefore it was decided to make the announcement before he departed the country. One interlocutor suggested that President Sezer, a staunch secularist, insisted on an early announcement to ensure that nothing interfered with the decision. Several papers did report Sezer's influence on the timing. Other papers suggested that the early announcement was a GOT attempt to present an olive branch to the military given recent tensions. Whatever the reason, the decision was covered extensively for just one day before the media turned its attention back to PKK attacks and Lebanon. This allowed both the military and government to avoid a week of speculation about whether or not Buyukanit would actually get the top job, and to focus their joint efforts on other priority issues.

15. (C) Buyukanit faced a rocky road to the top this past year. In Nov. 2005, he weathered rumors that PM Erdogan wanted Ozkok to extend his tenure as CHOD for an additional year. Ozkok, like Buyukanit, was born in 1940 and could technically serve until 2008, but quickly and publicly reaffirmed his intention to retire on schedule. In March 2006, Buyukanit was accused of interfering in the trial of an NCO suspected in a book store bombing in the southeast when he commented positively on the character of the suspect (ref c). Following a discussion between Erdogan and Ozkok, the charges were dropped and the Prosecutor who filed the charge was sacked and disbarred. Charges of misdeeds during Buyukanit's command of the 7th Army Corps in Diyarbakir from 1996-1998 surfaced, then disappeared. The press also suggest that Land Forces Academy Commander MG Reha Taskesen resigned on July 5, following revelations of an affair and questions about his friendship with Buyukanit, in order to protect Buyukanit. As recently as July 19, it was reported that Buyukanit himself might resign over the repeated accusations. Throughout it all, Buyukanit has remained quiet, expressing his willingness to answer questions but deferring to his leadership to handle the situation.

16. (C) Buyukanit's rise to the top is no surprise. A staunch secularist who believes in the military's role as the protector of Ataturk's republic, he is a charismatic leader, popular with the troops and loyal to his employees. According to a July 27 article in the Turkish weekly TEMPO, Buyukanit shakes the hands of his staff every morning. While commanding the 7th Army Corps in Diyarbakir, despite his secular beliefs, Buyukanit reportedly invited the Mayor to host Iftar dinners during Ramazan at the Officers' Club, and, although a heavy smoker, he refrained from smoking during the day out of respect for those who were fasting. Buyukanit is comfortable in international fora, having attended the NATO Staff College and having served at the NATO command in Brussels and at NATO AFSOUTH in Naples. He openly expresses his desire to work with the US.

17. (C) On multiple occasions, Buyukanit has told US military that, despite political differences between our two countries, there has never been a problem between our two militaries. He confided that he would like to see a return to the traditionally strong bilateral relationship we enjoyed during the Cold War but stated that negative public perception of US policy in the region would be an obstacle. Buyukanit appeared to be genuinely impressed by his reception during a Dec. 2005 counterpart visit to the US Army Chief of Staff, stating that it was the most impressive ceremony he has received in fifty years of service to Turkey.

18. (C) A straight talker, Buyukanit has unnerved the government with his direct, open confrontation of issues. Press reports suggest that the GOT fears a public conflict with Buyukanit over its policies towards the EU, Cyprus, and the PKK, among other issues, and therefore attempted to

besmirch his reputation and undermine his appointment. While he is more gregarious and less circumspect than Ozkok, he is unlikely to change the western-oriented course that Ozkok began. That said, having fought the PKK in the southeast and allegedly survived two PKK assassination attempts (1995 and 2005), Buyukanit is expected to draw a hard line on eliminating the terrorist threat to Turkey. His stance towards fundamentalists may be equally tough, given the belief in military circles that the religious supporters of Fetullah Gulen were behind many of the accusations leveled against him.

Visit Ankara's Classified Web Site at
<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/eur/ankara/>

WILSON